

wise zealous observers of the statutes of the university, and that for conscience' sake, but their chief desire was to be Bible Christians." In 1735, Messrs. John and Charles Wesley, Mr. Ingham and Mr. Delamotte came to this country with a design to preach the Gospel to the Indians in Georgia. In 1738 Mr. Whitefield followed, but they all soon returned to England. In the early part of 1738 Mr. Wesley obtained the knowledge of salvation by the remission of sins, and shortly after his labors in the ministry were the means of awakening in the minds of many, in and about London, a deep concern for their eternal welfare. They eagerly ran to him for farther advice, and in order to meet their wants he appointed to meet them once a week, namely, on a Thursday evening. This was properly the origin of the Societies, but they were not divided into classes until 1742, when, as Mr. Wesley expresses it, "many met together (at Bristol) to consult concerning a proper method of paying the debt on the building in which they worshipped. It was agreed, (1.) That every member of the society should contribute a penny a week. (2.) That the whole society should be divided into little companies or classes. (3.) That one person in each company should receive the contributions of the rest, and bring them to the stewards weekly. Thus began that excellent institution, (class-meetings,) merely upon a temporal account, from which we have reaped so many spiritual blessings."

The first Conference met in London in 1744—Five clergymen and one lay preacher was present; the design of their meeting was to confer with each other as to *what to teach, how to teach, and what to do*, or how to regulate their doctrine, discipline, and practice. The "General Rules" of the societies were drawn up in the year 1743. The Discipline, under the title of "The Large Minutes," was first completed in the year 1789. It embraces the several conversations of Mr. Wesley and his preachers between the years 1744 and 1789. This tract contains the plan of discipline as practised in the Methodist connection, during the life of Mr. Wesley. The book which, in this country, goes by the name of "The Discipline," was first arranged in the year 1792; was republished in 1793, with notes by Dr. Coke and Mr. Asbury, and has been often republished, without the notes, since. It is subject to revision, under certain limits and restrictions, at every General Conference, which occurs once in four years. The formation of circuits and districts has been a work of time, as circumstances required. In the year 1789 there were in England, Wales, and the Isle of Man 74 circuits; in Ireland 28; and in Scotland 7. Now there are in England, Wales, and the Isle of Man 89 districts, including 404 circuits; in Ireland 11 districts, including 42 circuits; in Scotland and the Shetland Isles 3 districts, including 14 circuits. On the foreign missions under the care of the British Conference, there are 22 districts, including 216 circuits and stations. In this country there are now 23 conferences, including 189 districts, and 2227 circuits and stations, or charges, as they are called. The whole number of members at the present time, in this country, is between seven and eight hundred thousand, and in other countries between three and four hundred thousand—making, in all, little more than a million. Thus, within less than a century, from one man, under God, has sprung up "an exceeding great army," which, like the "stone cut out of the mountain without hands," may yet perhaps "fill the whole earth."

Of the early Methodist preachers it may be said with strict propriety, their very first principle was, that they existed for the purpose of spreading true religion through the land. This they bore in mind, on this they acted, and, in this respect, they are worthy of our imitation.

They endeavoured, when addressing the mixed

multitudes that flocked to hear them, to speak of things of God in language easy to be understood. Had not this been the case, they would never have ensured a continuance of crowded congregations; nor would they, however numerous their auditories might be, have produced among them any good effect.

The simplicity of their manners appears to have impressed the mind of Mr. Wesley himself very forcibly. On one occasion, he informs us, it made him almost forget the seventeen hundred years between the time in which he lived and that of the infancy of Christianity, where form and state were not, but were Peter and Paul presided in the demonstration of the Spirit and of power.

Closely connected with this was the plainness of their dress. The arguments by which their founders enforced the duty of plainness of dress were then, and are still unanswerable; and many, if not all of his early followers conscientiously regarded them.

In their attacks on sin and folly they spared neither the theatre, nor the card table, nor the ball-room. The onset was vigorous, and the weapons of warfare were powerful, and in many instances successful. A remarkable prominence was given by them to experimental religion. Their repentance was not merely a speculative conviction of the fact of human depravity; their faith was not a mere assent of the understanding; their holiness was not a mere notion of a finished work wrought for them by another, with which they had no farther concern than to trust in it; their experience was real, and personal, and deep; and never will it be otherwise with their followers while the sermons of Mr. John Wesley, the Checks of Fletcher, and the evangelical Hymns of Mr. Charles Wesley are read or sung in the spirit in which they were written.

Their zeal was of the most active and enterprising character. If there were a town or a village within their reach, the inhabitants of which were ignorant and wicked for want of a preached Gospel, the inquiry was "How shall we obtain an introduction?" and it was not a small obstacle that discouraged the attempt. With no less an object before them than the evangelizing of the whole land, they labored unweariedly for the attainment of their object. There was a spirit in them similar to that of the Roman Emperor, but far more noble in its object, which counted nothing done while any thing remained undone.

And their patience in suffering was as remarkable as their zeal. In England, by many, they were denounced as enemies to the Church and to the state, but particularly the former. In Ireland they were persecuted both by Papists and Protestants—by one party they were treated as heretics, and the other as persons not fit to live. In Scotland it was very difficult for many years to obtain a footing on any condition. In the West Indies they were persecuted to imprisonment, and, in some instances, even to death. In the East Indies, their entrance into that region being of more recent date, they have suffered comparatively little; but in the islands of the Pacific they have suffered all but death. In Africa, if they were not murdered, as Mr. Threlfall was, they were, from the insalubrity of the climate, almost sure to meet with an untimely grave; and in this country they were for a long time considered as enemies to the Gospel of Christ; while in Canada their fellow subjects have, in some instances, done all they could to deprive them of their rights.

In one place power sought to crush them. In another learning, in the garb of eloquence and sophistry, arrayed itself against them. In another ignorance assailed them with dangerous missiles, and in another the mixed multitude sought, by various means, to destroy them or drive them away. They were indeed "persecuted, but not destroyed," and when